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Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

577

TO : The Ambassador

DATE: December 30, 1953

FROM : H. E. Urist

SUBJECT: Activities of Colonel Carlos CASTILLO Armas and Members of His Group in Guatemala

I was visited this afternoon by a source who has in the past given the Embassy reliable information on agrarian matters. Although I have known him for some time, we have recently become more friendly, and it was not until today that I learned of his connection with individuals carrying on subversive activities in Guatemala.

The source told me that he was Colonel Carlos CASTILLO Armas' representative and contact man for the University anti-communist student group. He told me that about two weeks ago he had received a letter from the Colonel asking him to take charge of the University wing in a three-month publicity campaign which would precede military action against the ARBENZ government. The source said that he had written Colonel Castillo Armas advising him that, in his opinion, three months was far too long a period for such a campaign, suggesting a one-month period instead.

The source then showed me the latest reply received from Colonel Castillo Armas. It was a typewritten letter delivered by messenger, dated 12/26/53, signed by "Mr. King" and containing several code names such as "Don Alvaro", "Mr. Hogger" (?) and "Mr. P." In this letter Colonel Castillo Armas told the source that he was inclined to agree with his idea of a one-month period of preparation for the move and asked the source to get in touch with a contact known to him for further instructions.

The source said that he was not too happy about the matter, because while he has implicit faith in Colonel Castillo Armas as an individual, the number of trustworthy members of the opposition in the Castillo Armas camp may not be sufficiently large to overcome the Government forces. He said he was not referring to the Army so much as the miscellaneous armed individuals in Government employment. He said that he had actually seen small arms such as carbines in the National Agrarian Department (DAN) office and that he has it on good authority that a certain number of leaders of each labor union have been armed by the Government.

With reference to the United States Government, he said that his group was fully aware that the United States had done all that could be expected of it, and that the militant opposition to the Government appreciated very much U. S. steps to prevent entrance of arms into Guatemala, "even though that also has affected us."

On the subject of arms, he said that he had just picked up the following information which he had been unable to verify in its entirety, although he knew part

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of it to be correct: several days ago Colonel GIRON of the Guatemalan Armed Forces (probably Colonel Felipe Antonio GIRON, Chief of the Guatemalan Air Force) left for Los Angeles with $80,000 in cash on his person in an effort to bribe any individuals who would stand in the way of obtaining five P-57 airplanes which the Guatemalan Army is anxious to purchase.

The source told me that the Salama revolt of March 29, 1953, was the result of a move made by one individual, Mr. Carlos SIMONS. He explained this by saying that the Salama incident was not supposed to have taken place, that is, the Castillo Armas group had a much more inclusive plan for revolts throughout the country and that it was only because of the treachery of one man who confided the plot to Mr. Simons that the Salama incident was provoked. Mr. Simons, a follower of General Miguel IDIGORAS Fuentes, had not been taken into the confidence of the Castillo Armas group, and, when he found out that a movement was in process, tried to ride in on the coattails of the other opposition group.

I asked the source if he knew the whereabouts of Sr. Juan CORDOVA Cerna, opposition leader who recently escaped from Guatemala. He said that he received a post card from him about a week ago from Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, although he does not know where he is at present.

I asked him where Castillo Armas was at the present time. He said he actually did not know, but suspected he was no longer in Honduras and was operating from El Salvador. On the subject of El Salvador and its possible part in the Castillo Armas operation, he said that he suspected many communications were carried by Ambassador FUNES' diplomatic pouch. He also said that it is not unlikely that the removal of Colonel POLANCO as Minister of Defense of El Salvador was connected in some way with the Castillo Armas movement.

During the course of the conversation he indicated that he was nervous and worried about the situation and possible results of any action taken against the Government. Referring to the possible discovery of his participation in the movement, he said, "I am thirty years old and have the responsibility of a wife and two kids--and these boys play for keeps."

He also said that his group does not need any money and that, as stated above, the U. S. Government could give them nothing at this time. He lamented the lack of moral fiber in the great majority of Guatemala's opposition and said that he wished I could meet more of the young, courageous, anti-Government people in Guatemala "like the two couples you met at my house last week." He was referring to two young married couples Mrs. Urist and I met Christmas night at a small party at the source's home.

In speculating on what would happen if a successful revolt were to take place, he expressed great disdain for the Guatemalan Army and said that any efforts the opposition makes will be wasted if a successful revolt puts Guatemala in the hands of the typical military triumvirate made up of incumbent military officers, for "that would simply be a matter of changing coats." He also speculated on the U. S. Government's position with reference to recognition of a new government in Guatemala. I told him that as far as recognition is concerned I could not foretell the action of my Government, but that I thought that first things came first and removing communists from power was the first consideration.

In discussing the activities of the exiled students in Honduras, he mentioned the name of Honduras' Ambassador to Guatemala, Lic. Octavio DURON. He said none of his group trusted the Ambassador and he believed that the latter was actually in the employ of the Guatemalan Government. He said, "there is just too much money in evidence, and the Ambassador does not have a very great personal income."

When discussing the Salama affair, the source told me that his group had just learned (December 29) of a planned escape (December 31) from the Salama jail by some of the prisoners. He said that since they had not previously been advised of the plan, they suspected that Government plants had had a hand in the plot in order to make the prisoners flee so that they could either be shot while escaping or be permitted to go into exile. The source said that the sister of one of the prisoners, Mario SANDOVAL, had been sent immediately to Salama to warn her brother and his companions not to attempt the break.

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